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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000075

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

S/ES-O FOR SECRETARY'S PARTY IN NEW YORK, NSC FOR
ABRAMS/PASCUAL/RAMCHAND, NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: GAZA UPDATE JANUARY 8, 2009, 1300 LOCAL

REF: (A) JERUSALEM 61

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The IDF maintained its positions on January 8 and continued operations around Gaza City and Rafah. Up to 10,000 Palestinians from Rafah evacuated their homes in response to leaflets warning of impending operations in the area. A humanitarian pause began at 1300. Three rockets from Lebanon lightly injured two Israelis. Gaza-based health officials reported 702 dead (45 percent civilians) and 3,100 wounded since hostilities broke out.

Ground Operation Continues

¶2. (SBU) Gaza-based sources and local press reported that the IDF continued operations around Gaza City January 7-8. IDF units maintained their position near the defunct Rafah airport and northeast of al-Burayj refugee camp and moved to the outskirts of al-Qarara, northeast of Khan Yunis.

-- In southern Gaza, the IDF engaged militants on the outskirts of al-Qarara the night of January 7, killing at least one, but no IDF activity was reported inside the urban area of Khan Yunis;

-- Palestinian workers at the Erez crossing came under IDF tank fire the morning of January 8, killing one and wounding two;

-- the IDF continued to operate around the towns of Bayt Lahiya and Bayt Hanun January 8, reportedly killing a family of four in their car in Bayt Lahiya; and

-- the IDF continued to operate around the Jabaliya refugee camp, east of Gaza City, and south of the city.

¶3. (SBU) The PA President's Office told PolSpec that as many as 10,000 Palestinians evacuated their homes in southern Rafah in response to leaflets dropped by Israeli aircraft January 7, warning the residents of impending ground and air operations near the Egyptian border. Palestinian media reported up to 16,000 displaced persons in the area, many of whom took shelter in UNRWA schools.

¶4. (SBU) ICRC reported that PRCS ambulances evacuated 30 Palestinians from the Zaytun neighborhood in Gaza City during the January 7 humanitarian pause. Ambulances removed two of at least 15 corpses from the area, saying that more dead and wounded remain. ICRC issued a public statement noting that the IDF failed to meet its obligation under international humanitarian law to care for and evacuate the wounded.

¶5. (SBU) A humanitarian pause began at 1300 and is expected to last for three hours.

Airstrikes Continue

¶6. (SBU) Gaza-based sources and local press reported that the IAF struck 60 targets January 7-8, hitting homes, two mosques, and several HAMAS-controlled security installations (many of which had previously been hit). At least three militants were killed and a dozen Palestinians wounded in these attacks. Targets included:

- homes in Rafah along the border area on the morning of January 8, in which at least one elderly man was killed;
- homes of HAMAS commanders in Rafah and Khan Yunis; and
- twenty airstrikes in and around Gaza City before dawn on January 8.

Rocket Fire Causes Two Injuries

¶7. (SBU) Israeli media reported three rockets fired from Lebanon struck northern Israel on the morning of January 8, wounding two and sending several people into shock. The IDF fired five artillery shells into Lebanon in response. These are the first rockets fired from Lebanon during this operation.

¶8. (SBU) Israeli media reported at least 13 rockets fired into Israel from Gaza before 1300 local on January 8. Reports said a total of 25 rockets were fired from Gaza on January 7.

Casualties

¶9. (SBU) Gaza-based health officials reported as of January 8 that 702 people have been killed since hostilities began, including 219

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children, 89 women, and 12 paramedics. Palestinian medical contacts in Gaza and local press report that 24 Palestinians were killed on January 7.

¶10. (SBU) Israeli media reported seven soldiers killed in action and 104 wounded since hostilities began.

West Bank Reactions and Security

¶11. (SBU) Demonstrations continued in towns throughout the West Bank and in East Jerusalem on January 8. Israeli police shot and killed a Palestinian man who was trying to set fire to a gas station near Ma'ale Adumim.

WALLES